



CAREER GUIDANCE—NOW AND THEN: HIGH TECH *and* HIGH TOUCH

BY EUGENIA NEWELL

There is a lot new in career guidance. Technology is a driving force in the workplace, and it has changed how we teach and what we teach. It should also change how we talk to students about their future. The digital age has provided new depth to career awareness and exploration and new responsibilities for career guidance professionals. The creation of hundreds of new jobs can keep a career guidance professional busy! What is a “business continuity planner?” What skills and knowledge are needed to be a “user experience designer?” Must nursing informatics be licensed registered nurses before they enter this field? An ever-growing list of new jobs means the career guidance professional must be aware of new opportunities for students. New jobs require new skills. As career and technical teachers must be current with software and business trends, the career guidance professional must keep up with the needs and skills of a changing workplace in

order for them to best serve students.

Nanotechnology and high-tech research will change occupations in many ways. What are the qualifications for a “nanoprobe development engineer” or an “optoelectronics process engineer?” What exactly is precision agriculture? How is the introduction of silicones and cationic polymers and MRI imaging creating a revolution in the training of aestheticians? How will new U.S. health care provisions change the skills, knowledge and licensing requirements for medical occupations? How is technology changing opportunities for disabled workers? These are the kinds of questions that we must be able to answer for our students.

Technology has also changed career information delivery systems for students. Students have more access to career information than ever before. A wealth of career guidance information is available to every student at school, at home and even on their phones! Online programs can tell students what salary they will earn

in urban and rural areas all across the country. Electronic plans of study offer links to far away postsecondary programs that align with students’ career pathways and majors. Online videos can provide a look into hundreds of job sites. Electronic portfolios and online job interviews are also changing the way students initially job search. Students must demonstrate proficiency in several computer programs to even apply for some jobs.

High Tech no Substitute for High Touch Strategies

But amidst the high tech, we must not forget about high touch. High touch means going beyond the computer screen images and the videos and technical requirements. Computer programs can provide a great deal of statistical and descriptive information about jobs. However, an opportunity to job shadow, participate in an internship or spend time with a mentor is equally important. Work-based learning, cooperative projects and having articulate

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speakers visit the classroom are nothing new. They have been the staple of career exploration for years. But are they being overshadowed and underused now that technology can deliver a lot of information in a short time? Job shadowing, cooperative learning and mentoring are strategies that provide an authentic look into the real world of work. Career success and longevity are also about the relationships and soft skills that help workers excel in a cooperative work environment—

things you can't learn from a computer. Are students acquiring those skills, too, even as they are expected to be proficient in technical skills?

We also need to remember that at the heart of career guidance is helping students to understand themselves, just as it always has been. Providing students with ways to develop self-knowledge and helping them learn how to make good decisions are essential to career success and fulfillment. Students can now endlessly

research career options through very sophisticated systems. But students need to be encouraged to devote time and thought to assessing their strengths and weakness, their likes and dislikes, and their work values. The real-time experience of being in a prospective workplace can alter career decisions. Workplace experiences and mentors cannot be overlooked or replaced. A quality work experience, a cooperative learning project or a well-informed speaker can provide insight into the day-to-day tasks that make up a job, and ultimately a career. While much in career guidance is new and exciting, helping students achieve their goals is still the main mission of our profession.

The Perfect Combination

We must use the strategies of high tech and high touch to be effective. We must balance both as we create a framework for students to investigate and prepare for their future in a rapidly changing workplace. We must ask: Are the guidance programs that we offer relevant and current? Do we still embrace the notion that career guidance is an art, not a science?

The end result of career counseling is made up of individual decisions by individual students about individual jobs. As counselors we must be proactive in acknowledging not only the changes students face in the workplace of the future, but the techniques, old and new, to best prepare them for those changes. ■

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